



CompanyCommand

Building Combat-Ready Teams



To: Company Commanders

From: Jim Keirse, a fellow company commander, OIF 06-08

Reflections of a Counterinsurgency Company Commander (Part 2 of 2)

I had the privilege to command the outstanding Soldiers of Baker Company, 2-12 Infantry, in a predominantly Sunni area of Baghdad from January–December 2007. The topics covered below were critical to our success. I realize that each of us has a unique experience while de-

ployed, so I don't pretend to have all the answers. I'm just one guy, who served at one place, during a certain period of time. I hope the lessons we learned can assist others in their mission. (Note: The first part of Capt. Keirse's "Reflections..." appeared in the June issue of ARMY.)

Clearing the Mulhalla

We shifted to a new AO as part of the surge and moved to occupy a neglected Sunni area—one littered with IEDs. The insurgents had denied freedom of movement to Coalition forces in this area for months, capitalizing on a network of deep-buried IEDs.

We had intel from various sources and phone tips that allowed us to map out 40 or so likely IED hot spots. Over the course of three nights, the entire company dismounted (except for a mounted QRF/EOD escort) and cleared, by hand, every IED. Studs volunteered to dig for these IEDs with screwdrivers and tire irons. Over the course of three nights, the company found and reduced 18 buried IEDs of various types (predominantly antitank mines and pipe bombs). I'm still in awe of the success we achieved over those three nights. As we started to clear these IEDs (with controlled detonations ringing out every half hour), the enemy grew increasingly shaken, and he started a propaganda campaign on our tip line to make us think that on subsequent nights their IEDs would be overwatched with machine guns. We adjusted tactics accordingly, and the company crushed nuts, all three platoons pushing hard. A couple of studs got BSM-Vs for that operation, and it really set the stage to teach that neighborhood that we were there to stay and wouldn't abandon them. We told every local we ran into that we knew where the IEDs were because the citizens

told us—we didn't need any more informants because we had hundreds of people cooperating. (That was a bluff.)

IED Defeat

I won't get into the weeds on this one because folks are still fighting IEDs, and I don't want to give away any TTPs. Bottom line—you need to defeat IEDs so your guys have confidence that they can move in and dominate their area of operations, and so the population sees that the insurgents' chief weapon does not scare you. We lost a lot of great people to IEDs, but along the way, we learned to seriously defeat this menace.

Platoons were averaging 95 percent IEDs found by redeployment. Furthermore, the company standard was "IED found, triggerman killed/captured." By using local national tips and an understanding of enemy TTPs, we were able to neutralize a dozen separate triggermen with their hands on the detonators (not cell phones—IED detonators rigged to command wires). It can be done! And the positive effect of neutralizing thugs while they are holding the detonator to a bomb targeting your guys and then reducing the IED with EOD is extremely powerful.

Set conditions to destroy positively identified bad guys with precision fires. Make good use of overwatch positions. Shooting the right guy teaches the enemy and population that evil has consequences. The corollary is that a poor



SSgt. Gabriel Temples waits for EOD to neutralize one of approximately 30 IEDs he discovered. He was fearless.

The language of a Soldier in Iraq is full of acronyms. Here is a glossary for this article.

AO—area of operations; AQ—al Qaeda; BSM-V—Bronze Star Medal for Valor; CA—civil affairs; CCA—close combat attack (aviation); CERP—commander's emergency response program; CF—Coalition forces; CP—command post; DAC—district advisory council; EOD—explosive ordnance disposal; EPRT—embedded provincial reconstruction team; FSO—fire-support officer; FSNCO—fire-support noncommissioned officer; HHC—headquarters, headquarters company; IA—Iraqi army; IED—improvised explosive

device; ISF—Iraqi security forces; ISR—intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance; ISV—Iraqi security volunteer; NAC—neighborhood advisory council; NTC—National Training Center; QRF—quick reaction force; RFI—request for information; RIP—relief in place; S-2—intelligence officer; THT—tactical human intelligence team; TTP—tactic, technique or procedure; UAV—unmanned aerial vehicle; USAID—U.S. Agency for International Development; VBIED—vehicle-borne improvised explosive device.

shot—one that hits an innocent person or leads to collateral damage—is worse than not shooting at all.

Close Encounters

One of our most important campaigns, as a company, was connecting with the population. We developed a comprehensive interview and household-tracking operation to ensure that we periodically talked to every household in the area (of which there were approximately 3,500). My FSO took the lead on developing and tracking this operation, which we dubbed Close Encounters.

The FSO produced a packet for each residence/structure in the company AO. (Prior to this operation, he had produced a graphic labeling every structure in the AO.) To successfully fill out the packet, patrols had to sit down and talk to the head of household for 20 to 40 minutes. The packet consisted of simple demographic info (house number; phone number; head of household's name, tribe, age, employment, concerns; names of other folks living in the house; weapons info; length of residency; car info; etc.) and a series of photographs of each male in the house and of the entrance. Platoons would return the completed packets to the FSO or his representative (who trained the company CP on all database management). The CP would enter all the information and photos into an easy-to-access database, and the original packet would be filed.

The advantages of this program were numerous. Chiefly, Close Encounters got patrols to talk to almost every person in the neighborhood, increasing the patrols' skills at human engagement

and endearing them to the population. This proved to be even more important than the information collected for the database. The database proved useful on many occasions for verifying tips, tracking people down, or calling people back about concerns they raised during the interview.

Additionally, we would take the photos of every male in the *mulhalla* and show them to THT sources and others. We would mix in pictures of known bad guys to verify a source's knowledge base. Or, we could just show pictures and get the stories of individuals.



Sgt. Shin Kim, a medic, was killed while shielding a wounded soldier with his own body during a complex ambush. He has been recommended for a Silver Star.



From the memorial service for Sgt. Michael Martinez, Sgt. Gian Joya Mendoza, Sgt. Shin Kim, Spc. Dustin Workman and PFC Cory Hiltz, who were killed in a complex ambush involving multiple IEDs and grenades in 2007.

Close Encounters was one of those framework operations that gave the platoons something to do, in accordance with their own plan, for months at a time. The FSO would assign each platoon hundreds of Close Encounters objectives; the platoon leader would parcel them out among his various patrols and come up with a plan to achieve completion within the time frame I gave him. A given patrol would knock out only three to four Close Encounters a day to ensure quality of interviews and because they had competing patrol requirements. It was never a rushed operation. This was deliberate. I saw too many units decide they wanted to “census”

on, we began to include the biometrics data. Biometrics’ chief advantage is psychological; folks who’ve had their eyeballs and fingerprints scanned think Big Brother is watching them. Another mistake I’ve seen units do is rush an area to get biometrics on “every military-age male,” treating biometrics as an end rather than a means in achieving their larger mission. I would recommend making it part of an interview process as previously described. Also, be sure you see multiple forms of ID to verify the guy whose biometrics you are entering; you don’t want to fill out fields with false info.



SSgt. Temples, who served as platoon sergeant for Third Platoon, was popular with Iraqi children.



SSgt. Jason Kennedy spearheaded all projects and contracting for Company B, supervising the execution of 33 initiatives throughout the deployment.

Psychological Operations

Insurgents held our area using psychological operations. They would exaggerate the crimes of the Iraqi government or security forces. They would exaggerate al Qaeda's power and influence. As a counter to our successful IED clearance operation previously described, they took three low-level AQ guys of some out-of-favor faction, cut off their heads and put them in the main street with notes on their chests identifying them as Iraqi army informants. As we began to make inroads with the population, al Qaeda overplayed the hard-line stance, using fear to get the population back in line. (This was due to a shake-up in their leadership; they had a particularly effective insurgent leader killed during infighting, and his replacement quickly lost the support of the populace. This was good for us.)

Eventually, our perceived success led to desperation on AQ's side that led them to grossly mistreat the populace, giving us the opportunity to capitalize on their errors.

Bottom line: I recommend you exaggerate your successes and your power base with the people to the extreme. In the culture over there, you never hear of a force of a dozen guys about to attack your combat outpost—it's always 500 fighters from Syria. Likewise, a murderer hasn't killed three people—he's killed 400. So, you can plant seeds of exaggeration to make your enemy desperate, too.

Informant Operations

You will base everything you do on information from locals—or you should—because they know what is going on. So your patrols should have reliable folks they talk to for atmospherics and such, as well as reliable friends in the neighborhood. Never trust one person to tell you the absolute truth. People have their own frames of reference and agendas. Don't base targeting on informant X telling you guy Y (who lives in your neighborhood) is bad. Poorly targeted detentions are often worse than doing nothing at all. Take a look at your Close Encounters info on guy Y, give his photo to THT and develop the target. Note: If guy Y is "not from your area," he may be worth picking up for the temporary holding area while you send his photo around. Maybe he is a bad guy from another AO and this is a one-shot detention. Always remember, though, that folks may just be suspicious of the guy "not from their area," and if no one can name him or describe his crimes, he is destined to be let go. Rightly so.

Projects Methodology (CERP, Various Funds)

Funds, if unchecked and unsupervised, can work against you. In an area controlled by the enemy, insurgents will take protection money from your contractors, and you will be funding your own enemy. In a more hospitable area, if you fund the wrong contractors, you may continue to work against yourself. My philosophy is that funds should be used to achieve an effect—easier said than done. You will face pressure to get schools looking a certain way or to make X clinic look good, but remember to use the contractor or sphere of influence who will best achieve the effect you desire. You may face pressure to use a contractor who works well with your

higher headquarters but does not have the support of your local area nor employ locals. Take a hard look at who you want to support and what they are doing for you, and allocate money accordingly. People are getting rich working with Americans in Iraq. Make sure they are the right people.

ISF (National Police and Iraqi Army)

Our initial ISF partner was a National Police battalion. They were sectarian. They would mass 40 vehicles into the neighborhood and drive down the main street firing at storefronts. They conducted reprisals for attacks on themselves, detaining people without cause. Rumor has it they then ransomed the detainees back to the families. Not every national policeman in the battalion was bad or sectarian, but the actions of their unit made them a poor choice to gain the trust of the populace. Hopefully that National Police unit found itself reassigned to a Shia area or has been significantly rehabilitated.

We shifted AOs, and our new partners were IA. In Iraq, the perception is that the IA is less sectarian. Perception is reality. The IA had a great S-2 who understood counterinsurgency and worked to gain the people's trust. Their battalion commander understood the fight and did not work at cross-purposes with CF. Unfortunately, the battalion commander and the S-2 would take leave at the same time every month, and the battalion would fall under less competent leadership.

The IA in our AO never really became the force we wanted—taking lead in the counterinsurgency, with us in overwatch. They did achieve success at delivering propane and kerosene (operations we handed off to them after months of joint execution). Their willingness to escort folks to the hospital was a major coup. The IA, as we redeployed, were happy in their roles of securing the periphery of the neighborhood (at checkpoints) and conducting mounted and dismounted presence patrols within. I wanted them to assume more control of governmental functions (in

the absence of a governing entity) such as collecting ration cards, overseeing food distribution and working hand in hand with the CF-supported district advisory council. Most importantly, I wanted them to actually check vehicles coming through their checkpoints (to deny VBIED penetration), which they would do only under close observation. Ultimately, the IA did not work against our efforts, which is great. But they also did not take ownership of the campaign. Most likely this is because they weren't from Baghdad, weren't Sunni, worked for a National Police brigade whom they hated and were counting days before their unit was reassigned back north.

Local Governance

I am not sure we ever made much progress on this one. The local governmental organization we supported was the neighborhood advisory council, subordinate to the district advisory council. NAC representatives were scared to be known for what they were when we first arrived—were scared of being harassed or murdered. In fact, our NAC member was gunned down at his office during the summer. The rest of the deployment was spent trying to identify and empower a replacement NAC, a guy willing to serve the neighborhood. Ultimately we were forced to assume many of the functions of the NAC and were unable to identify a replacement until near the end of our tour.

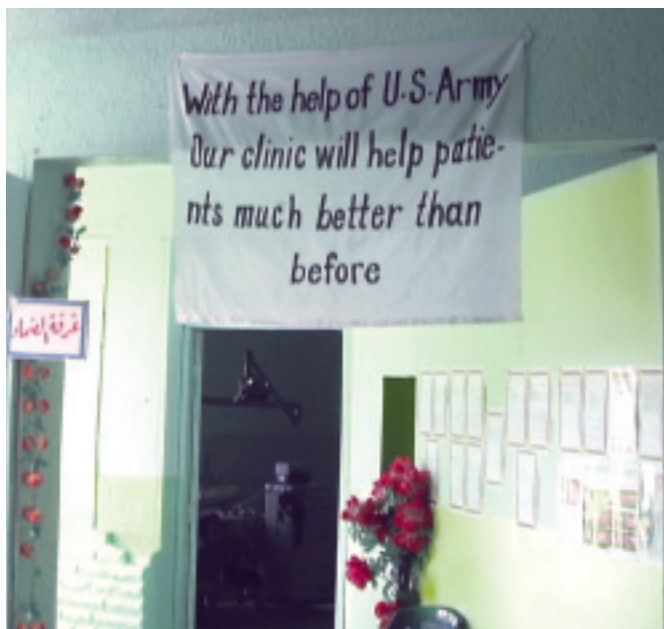
Good Things My Battalion Did for Us

Our battalion accomplished tasks that took a lot of weight off our shoulders. Most importantly, my battalion commander truly put each company commander in charge of his own area and, in doing so, fostered ownership. A plan that rotates companies through a given battlespace, whether to ensure coverage during the day or to provide companies a refit status, will be less effective than creating landowners. We saw it in sister battalions on our flanks. If the company commander does not own his own chunk of land, you will have elements working at cross-purposes and the population will suffer.

Our battalion FSNCO became a master at contracting and the utilization of various funds. If I identified a project or effect to achieve in the AO, I would explain the effect to my FSNCO, and he would talk to the battalion FSNCO to find the proper way to fund it. Together, they would prepare and submit the contract or fund request.

Then the battalion FSNCO tracked the request or approved contract process and gave updates directly to me. Money achieves effects and, properly utilized, is one of your greatest assets. Our battalion cracked the code on getting money to landowners.

Our battalion's HHC commander served as a direct liaison to the functionaries at the DAC and coordinated with



Local recipients of aid did their best to recognize Company B's contributions with feasts and signs. This sign was hung in a clinic in East Rashid.

upper echelons of CA, EPRTs and others. He assumed a great deal of painstaking coordination from all the companies when dealing with Iraqi government organizations. For example, when we were nominating a new individual to serve on the neighborhood advisory council, the provincial advisory council required a good deal of paperwork to get the guy looked at. Our HHC commander took lead on getting the paperwork through the provincial council (not a quick task) for all the companies.

One thing that will constantly challenge a battalion is the allocation of scarce resources. I think all battalions have a plan and method for allocating typical scarce resources—UAV, enablers, aerostat, fixed-wing ISR, CCA. These are your “NTC enablers.” And they don’t accomplish a whole lot for you. The resources that are more challenging to allocate, at battalion and brigade levels, are the stuff that actually makes a difference—such as propane distribution, kerosene distribution, food and other commodities, municipal sewage, trash and electrical workers. The allocation of these essen-

pumped full of governmental and USAID money, but the execution of their actual functions is left in the haphazard hands of competing company commanders! Our battalion never worked this out among the various companies and adjacent battalions, and it was always first come, first served for sewage.

We ran into similar problems as companies that wanted to “help their area” would ignore the NAC’s published propane distribution schedule and hijack the propane to distribute in their area. That may be great for that area in the short run, but it sabotages good order and robs another neighborhood of an essential, rationed commodity. Our battalion never really cracked the code on the allocation of these commodities or services. I recommend that an organization with resource requirements dedicate serious time in the battalion targeting meeting towards commodities and services, and then fight to ensure that the companies get their allocations. A battalion wouldn’t let some other entity steal their UAV away unless it was troops in

contact; the same mentality must apply when another battalion is stealing a company’s propane. Establish and enforce schedules for commodities and services. Our battalion did a great job at getting the typical NTC enablers for us. The next level is controlling all the resources that enable a given area to get back to a state of normalcy.

The most important thing to remember as a company battlespace owner in a counterinsurgency is that if you really care about something or some staff function, you need to take ownership of it or replicate that staff function at your level. Battalion staffs have reporting requirements and tasks assigned by the Bn Cdr, Bn XO or BDE; the only way you can ensure top priority for anything is to do it in house. For example, we replicated all detainee tracking across the battalion’s battlespace within our company CP. If an Iraqi wanted to know about X guy who was detained last month, I wanted my patrol leader to be able to respond within minutes. So our CP tracked all that info down and got

the info to the guy on the ground. We also developed relationships with adjacent battalion and company intel cells so we could send RFIs directly to landowners rather than through our battalion staff.

Establishing Iraqi Security Volunteers

This was a long campaign—and a complicated one. Earlier I alluded to the fact that the IA were not interested in securing the inside of the neighborhood, just the periphery. I wanted a neighborhood watch willing to deny safe haven to IED emplacements. Initially, we supported a local security group



The daily fight takes its toll on equipment. Here, Spc. Anthony Bailey inspects a truck after an IED blast.

tial resources will make or break a landowner’s effort.

The local municipal station serviced six different companies’ AOs across two battalions. Each company wants the manholes within his area pumped free of sewage. The municipal station has one sewage truck. They long ago stopped trying to work a municipal plan to attack the sewage problem, instead working on a series of bribes or decisions to curry favor between the municipal station operator and various neighborhoods. The other way they get employed is when irate patrol leaders arrive and force them to work in their AO. This municipal station is getting



Capt. Jim Keirse (center) and one of his platoon leaders, 1st Lt. Tim Gross, meet with their Iraqi security volunteer “lieutenants.”

standing up in another battalion’s area as a test bed because conditions were better set in that area for such a group.

When the time came to establish volunteers in our AO, we triple-vetted all candidates and used a vouching system. A local cadre, in a blind vetting, had to vouch for each volunteer. Volunteers carried a badge and were identified by a badge number. The badge indicated which cadre member had signed for the volunteer. The cadre member was financially liable and could face imprisonment for any transgressions by the volunteer. The volunteers were assigned places and times of duty. We maintained a daily assignment sheet at the Iraqi security volunteer CP, by badge number, so X patrol could go out and spot-check every volunteer to ensure he was doing his job. A patrol could dock an individual’s pay by recording his badge number and letting me know the number and transgression. We were extremely harsh on discipline. Late for work—lose 20 percent of your pay for the month. Shirt not tucked in—lose 20 percent of your pay. I also empowered the ISV leadership to make such corrections.

We spent a lot of time with the ISVs, ensuring that they understood the temporary nature of their function. They knew that their role was just to ensure security for the neighborhood during these trying times and that they must work hand in hand with the IA. We would have a daily synch with the local IA company commander, the ISV leaders and Coalition forces. At this daily meeting, we would all

eat breakfast and address the minor issues of the day. The ISVs took on a lot of tasks that I wish the IA would have taken on—tasks we could never do ourselves. I tasked the ISVs to get a list of all the poorest families (so we could better target humanitarian assistance). They returned, after consulting with the imams and tribal sheiks, with a list of about 55 families. The list included name, specific circumstances of concern, phone number and address. We independently verified each family, and the information was 100 percent accurate. The ISVs would secure road repaving contracts, give a roll-up of transformers as contractors repaired them, repair holes in walls, recommend areas for cleanup and ensure the safety of contractors. They embedded at IA checkpoints and on IA patrols, working jointly.

I had a series of meetings with the imams and tribal leaders to introduce the ISVs and clearly define the mandate under which they operated, as well as to establish that they were not a permanent force. The tribal leaders and general population were given direct contact information to get in touch with either IA or CF in the event of ISV malfeasance. The danger of establishing such an organization is that it will be populated by thugs or act like organized crime, or that it will have some kind of sectarian agenda. Thus the ISV required constant attention and an even hand to squelch any such shifts. I would spend four to six hours of every day working directly with the ISVs, and my platoon leaders spent many more.



Capt. Keirsey enjoys a typical lunch with the leaders of his Iraq army partner unit at their compound.

End State

As we redeployed, the ISVs were taking care of the mundane tasks I would normally assign to patrols. The IA was running the periphery effort and ensuring government support of the neighborhood. Americans were in overwatch. We conducted a thorough RIP (you'd have to ask the incoming guys exactly how effective it was, but we did our best), and we had achieved success on what we had set out to do:

■ **Goal 1.** Regular and predictable delivery of essential commodities (propane, kerosene, food, electricity). *This was functioning, overseen by the IA. Shortages throughout Baghdad continued to cause issues with fuels.*

■ **Goal 2.** Increased local medical capability (defined as: clinic with trauma and ambulance capability). *Two functioning clinics and a triage for things requiring higher care.*

■ **Goal 3.** No IEDs on the roads. IEDs denied by a network of local informants ready to take up arms against those who would bury bombs in their streets (local solution—defeat IEDs by proxy). *The security situation had improved drastically—no IEDs for the last five months, no attacks, no murders. This was due primarily to our efforts giving rise to the ISVs and the momentum carried over from western Iraq.*

■ **Goal 4.** Legitimized and non-reprisal-focused Iraqi security forces meeting regularly and hospitably with locals. *Happening. IA doing a good job.*

■ **Goal 5.** Kids in school. Parents confident that kids would be safe at school. *All schools renovated, functioning and asking for Internet. Kids all over the place. Every store in the neighborhood opened and doing business.*

If you are a CC member and want to join the conversation on Jim's experiences or share some of your own, log on to <http://cc.army.mil>. If you are not a currently commissioned Army officer and wish to contribute to the conversation, send your thoughts to peter.kilner@us.army.mil and we'll post them for you. A final thought: When we reflect on our experiences, not only do we learn more from them ourselves, but we also enable others to learn from them, thus advancing the practice of leadership in the U.S. Army.

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Art by Jody Harmon

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